

VOICES FROM THE FRONT LINES

Real Stories of American Families
Living Without Paid Leave—and
Glimpses of a Brighter Future

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The number of American workers unable to care for themselves or their families when sick is staggering. Forty percent don't earn a single paid sick day; millions who do can't use the time to care for a sick family member. Others receive demerits for using time they have earned. Only 12 percent of the U.S. workforce have paid family leave to care for a newborn or seriously ill family member; less than 40 percent have temporary disability insurance for a personal medical emergency.

In the pages that follow, you'll hear from the people behind these numbers. They illustrate the huge financial loss and strain for families, but also for our economy. And they show the cost in human terms—the spread of contagious ailments, the consequences of treatment deferred, the heartbreak of a child alone in a hospital room.

These are *Voices from the Front Lines*: from moms and dads, sons and daughters, employees and employers and voters all across America. They know these policies are a win for our families and economy. And they're calling on leaders—regardless of party or geography—to join them and ensure our nation values families at work.

Voices from the Front Lines also inspire, because these individuals are activists in the fight to bring workplace policies into the 21st century and out of the *Mad Men* era. Thanks to thousands like them, nearly 20 million Americans can now earn paid sick days in a growing number of cities and states and can access family leave insurance in three states. And with the strength of this movement, more will follow.

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STRUGGLING WITHOUT PAID SICK DAYS

SPREADING SICKNESS TO COVER GROCERIES

Carlos Romero

Chicago, Illinois

Carlos has worked for many years as a server in the restaurant industry. Recently, while working at a Chicago deli, he became sick with the flu. “Many restaurant workers like myself do not have paid sick time and when ill, we must go without pay and also risk being terminated,” says Carlos. He informed his manager that he would not be able to come in. The response? “I was informed that I could be fired if I did not show for work.”

Carlos did not want to lose his job, so he had to work while sick. “Days later, a colleague of mine did get the flu from me and I worry who else was infected from working while sick,” Carlos says. “Paid sick time is an important policy that allows low-wage workers like myself to be healthy and not contaminate the public.”

Saffiyah A. Muhammad

East Orange, New Jersey



Saffiyah works as a peer counselor for families of children with special needs. When her

children were very sick with colds, Saffiyah caught the bug and had to go into work coughing and sneezing because she had no paid sick days. She spent a lot of time using hand sanitizer and wiping down the work station that other employees shared.

“I’m not 100 percent, and I’m in the workplace infecting my co-workers,” Saffiyah says. Paid sick days would allow people “to give 100 percent by being 100 percent.” It would also keep people from infecting co-workers. “One person sick today means five having to take off tomorrow.”

Rachel Mulroy

New Bedford, Massachusetts

Rachel was working in retail part time and contracted pink eye, not uncommon for the mother of two young daughters in daycare. She notified her boss around noon that she had to get an antibiotic and thought she shouldn’t come in for her 4:00 shift because pink eye is contagious within the first 24 hours. Her boss declared his belief that pink eye wouldn’t stop her from doing her job. “He said he still expected me in and on time,” says Rachel, “and thanked me for being a team player.”

Rachel did come in on time. She says she was unable to see out of her right eye because of the mucus and inflammation. “I had to fit people for tuxedos and work on the sales floor,” she says. “I started my treatment the next day but unfortunately it was too late—many of my coworkers working that day contracted it, and sadly I’m almost positive that I gave it to costumers I helped fit that day.”

Wanda Campbell

Hartford, Connecticut



Wanda drives a school bus to support her family of four. A few years ago, her son and daughter both

contracted the H1N1 virus. Because they’re also both diabetic, Wanda was particularly concerned. Her son ended up in the hospital and Wanda lost a week of work. As soon as they got better, Wanda caught the virus.

“I am the sole provider,” says Wanda, “so losing that one week of income

was horrible.” She had to drive the bus sick, constantly wiping down the seats and taking other precautions. It took a long time to catch up on bills.

Wanda became involved in the fight for Connecticut to become the first state with a paid sick days law. “Having paid sick days now is great for us,” Wanda says.

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so losing that one week of
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WORKING THROUGH PAIN, DELAYING TREATMENT

Lisa Lopez

Kissimmee, Florida



Lisa works as a deli associate at a major grocery retailer. Last year she went to work with her right eye shut, face swollen and a painful tooth

ache. Later she wound up in the emergency room with what turned out to be an abscessed tooth resulting in severe pain, fever and inflammation. Nevertheless, Lisa took only that one day off work.

“As a single mother and sole provider in my house, getting sick was not an option for me,” Lisa says. Her job would not accept a doctor’s note even though they could see the swelling in her face and pain in her eyes. She was embarrassed to have customers see her like that and in extreme pain. “I had to push through this pain so that I wouldn’t get fired or be seen as abandoning my job,” she says.

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Connie Ogletree

Atlanta, Georgia

Eight months ago, Connie woke up one morning with her left breast in extreme pain. She noticed a huge lump which was later diagnosed as a cyst that had become abscessed. Connie’s options: forfeit wages because of no paid time off or go into work in pain. She chose the latter. Her shift manager allowed her to leave early that day, as she couldn’t bear the pain.

Once Connie had breast surgery and recovered, her employer refused to offer her more than two days of work per pay period (every two weeks). The combination of the unpaid medical leave and the cut in hours has left her struggling to pay her bills, weighing public transportation to the doctor against co-pays and prescriptions.

Connie still needs to address additional health concerns but has had to delay treatment because she cannot afford to take the time off. “In a place called the greatest country



on the planet,” she says, “I see no reason why people who work hard trying to achieve the American Dream shouldn’t have paid time off to care for themselves or their children when an illness occurs.”

Emily Viergutz

New Hope, Minnesota

Emily knows what it’s like to work for low wages and have no paid sick days. As she puts it, “I couldn’t afford to get sick.” At one point she was so ill her brother forced her to go into

the doctor, who scolded her for not coming in sooner. After a chest x-ray, the doctor prescribed medication that cost \$140.00—that emptied her bank account. Losing two days’ pay put her in the hole.

Emily describes herself as “a frugal 28 year old.” She and her brother, who’s 31, share an apartment and a car. “When my mom was my age, she had two kids,” Emily says. “I can’t imagine having a family in this economy because I see my friends, who have children, struggle to survive.” She’s gotten involved in the fight for Earned Sick and Safe Time in Minnesota.

RISKING OUR LIVES TO SUPPORT OUR FAMILIES

Deb Ploof

Burlington, Vermont

Deb has worked for 16 years as a supervisor for a university food contractor. A few years ago the company implemented a sick time policy based on a point system. Employees accumulate points even for excused absences—the points lead to warnings after three points and suspension after seven. “This system has created a stressful atmosphere, leaving the employees fearful of losing their jobs due to illness,” says Deb.

Her daughter, a seven-year employee, accrued 6.5 points “due mostly to daycare calling her out of work because her son was sick.” Then she was diagnosed with a tubal pregnancy and was told to rest for a couple of weeks. Deb’s daughter refused to miss work because she was afraid she would lose her job. Two weeks later, she could hardly move. “I had to call her manager and have them promise not to give her another point or terminate her before she would agree to emergency surgery,” Deb says. “No one should ever have to feel that way.”

LEAVING CHILDREN ALONE IN THE HOSPITAL

Melissa Broome

Baltimore, Maryland

When Melissa's 4-year-old son Owen needed facial reconstruction surgery, she and her husband were both able to use paid sick days to spend the week with him in the hospital. Says Melissa, "My only job was to be his mom. Every time he was poked or prodded, I was next to him to hold his hand and whisper in his ear."

Not all the children's parents were able to do the same. "I was taken aback during our first day in the pediatric ICU to see how many children—and oftentimes babies—were there by themselves in those cold, sterile rooms," Melissa said. Their parents arrived in the evening after work. When Melissa took Owen for a walk in his red wagon, he'd point to a room with a young child alone. "Where are that boy's mommy and daddy?" he asked. "Why is he in there all by himself?"

Renay Brooks-Omisore

Providence, Rhode Island

In 2011, Renay's son, a police officer and father of two, suffered severe brain trauma when a driver hit his motorcycle. Renay recalls the

moment she had to leave her son in the hospital because she had to go to her job to keep her paycheck. "I remember telling my son, 'I have to leave you now, because I have to go to work, but we'll be back here in a couple of days, because you know we love you.' It's one of the hardest things to say to your family member as you hold their hand."

Jennifer Bevacqua, RN

Portland, Oregon



As a pediatric nurse practitioner, Jennifer every day recommends to parents that they stay home with their sick child—and

every day hears from parents that they can't get the time off work. "My job is to prioritize the health of the child, but I know that it's also critical to the child and the family that the parents keep their jobs," she says.

Recently she admitted a 1-year-old boy to the hospital. His grandmother, his primary caregiver, had to leave him at night to go to her job.

LIVING BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

Arthur Helms

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



Despite being a US Navy veteran, Art feels as if he is treated "like a slave with a job, working for peanuts for 23 years" at a fast food restaurant. The employees used to have vacation time but no longer do. Art has a bad nerve in his lower back that sometimes makes it hard for him to stand up. When that happens, the medication he takes makes him drowsy and unable to work.

"Being off work and not getting paid, I'm in danger of being evicted and losing my apartment. Now I'm seeing a therapist because I'm stressed and depressed because I don't know how I'm going to get my rent paid or my bills paid. I'm working a lot less hours than before because I keep having to go to the doctors. I keep showing them my hospital papers so they understand I'm sick but I'm afraid I'm going to get fired. If I had paid sick days, I could take care of my back and not worry about whether I'm going to end up homeless."

Vanessa Ramos

Orlando, Florida



Vanessa Ramos supports her three children, ages 10, 12 and 13, with a job at a fast food restaurant.

Although she's been there nearly two years, her schedule is sporadic, often

only 21 to 28 hours a week at \$8.09 an hour. Not having a predictable schedule and having so little money makes it hard to do much with her kids. She does not receive paid sick days and has called off sick only twice. Once they told her she had to come in anyway.

"I rode the bus one hour into work only to find out that they had found a replacement," Vanessa said. In May Vanessa joined the first ever fast food worker strike in Orlando's history.

Eliseo Hernandez

Washington D.C.



Eliseo has worked in the construction industry for 14 years and has never received paid sick days. In 2009, he learned he has Type 2 diabetes, requiring daily medication and check-ups every 3-4 months.

Eliseo began working for a demolition company in 2011. That July, he had an appointment scheduled to see his doctor. Despite a doctor's note, Eliseo could not get approval to go. This kept happening.

After missing his third appointment, Eliseo received a call from his health insurance company saying they had canceled his insurance because he missed three appointments. "They told me it seemed that my health is not important to me," Eliseo said. As a result, he can no longer get his medication.

"My health is important to me," says Eliseo. "My work is also important to me. But how can I keep working if I am not allowed to give some attention to my health?"

company. "It made me feel disposable," she said. "As a mother who cares for her son unconditionally, I'm not going to put my son in harm's way to make a shift at work." She's sharing her story to let Alex "know I'm strong and he can follow in my footsteps."



Raquel Rojas

Baltimore, Maryland

Randolph Ford

Baltimore, Maryland

Randy worked for many years as a security guard for a private contractor at a busy government agency in Baltimore City. He always showed up for work, even when he wasn't feeling well, because staying home guaranteed a loss of income.

Without access to paid sick days, Randy knew he had to work through illness in order to support his mother and two sons. However, one day, while doing a security walkthrough, his sinuses became dry, his chest tightened and it was suddenly very difficult for Randy to breathe.

This time he went to the emergency room, where he was diagnosed a severe case of pneumonia. Had he gone any longer without treatment, Randy's doctors predicted he may have died.

With no choice but to take time to recover, Randy, like many who work without the benefit of paid sick days, was disciplined for missing work when his employer reduced his scheduled hours. Eventually, after he complained about that treatment and lack of access to sick leave, Randy was fired.

At a popular chain restaurant in Baltimore's Inner Harbor, Raquel worked as a line cook making salads, directly handling patron's food each day. The restaurant is a favorite among the city's tourists, she says, "but the treatment of workers is really bad, especially in the kitchen"—and that's bad for the health of employees and for customers.

Because she could not afford to be docked pay, Raquel always came in when she was not feeling well. But after weeks of ignoring symptoms, Raquel was diagnosed with pneumonia and missed two weeks of wages.

When she returned to work with doctor's notes and medical records, her managers didn't discuss the absence with her, but instead reduced Raquel's hours until she was effectively removed from the schedule and jobless. Her attempts to speak with them were all but ignored. Sadly, Raquel's situation is not unique. She says that many of her former colleagues also lost their jobs after having to take unpaid leave to deal with an illness.

FACING RETALIATION

Rhiannon Broschat

Chicago, Illinois

Rhiannon combines work and school with caring for her son Alex. When Chicago schools closed because of the extreme cold, Alex, who has special needs, could not stay home alone. "He's very unique," says Rhiannon, "but I think he's the best kid in the world."

After a year and a half as a cashier for a big supermarket with no write-ups,

Rhiannon had accumulated absence points for things like leaving early after an asthma attack and having to go to Alex's school when he got hit in the face by a dodgeball. "I didn't think I should have gotten in trouble for something I couldn't control," Rhiannon says. This absence put her over the top.

When she first called in, her manager was very understanding. But the next day, Rhiannon got a call saying she'd "abused" the attendance policy and was being "separated" from the

George G. Ortiz-Mejias

Staten Island, New York

When his mother was struck by a car and needed surgery, George, a training specialist, took one week unpaid to be with her. He tried to convince his employer to allow him to work from home when his physical presence at work was not essential, but the employer denied the request. “I wanted to go to my mother’s medical appointments,” George says. “I was ‘cautioned’ to choose wisely between my manager’s orders and my mother’s appointment. I had to choose work.”

He began to use vacation days to accompany his mother to medical appointments where she needed assistance. For doing so, George was laid off. Given his and his mother’s loss of wages, George has had to tap into the savings he set aside for emergencies in order to pay the bills. “We are not renewing any of our medical prescriptions to save money,” he says.

I was ‘cautioned’ to choose wisely between my manager’s orders and my mother’s appointment. I had to choose work.

Amanda DeShazo

Tacoma, Washington

We know if we call in [sick], the manager just won’t put us on the schedule for the next week. Then it’s two weeks of lost wages.



Amanda started working as a sales associate at a major chain clothing store during her first year of college. As the

daughter of a single mom, she had to support herself to go to school. Amanda began at minimum wage and over five years, has seen raises totaling only \$1.15. Amanda fears speaking up will lead to a cut in hours.

The workers also don’t get any paid sick days. “All of us come in to work sick, or if we’re too sick to stand, try to find a sub,” says Amanda, “because we know if we call in, the manager just won’t put us on the schedule for the next week. Then it’s two weeks of lost wages.” Amanda is now helping win paid sick days in her town.

EXPERIENCING DOWNWARD MOBILITY

Arllyssa Heard

Detroit, Michigan

After 11.5 years as a program manager helping people transition from welfare to employment, Arlyssa lost her job when the contractor went out of business. The new firm hired most staff back but without any health insurance or paid sick days.

Arllyssa had no time to go to the doctor for herself and wound up in the emergency room needing a blood transfusion—with a bill of \$5,000. “There were a lot of things doctors could have caught earlier,” she says. She also has a son with sickle cell anemia, now age 19, who is frequently in the hospital. “Paid sick days would have allowed me to be with my son when he was hospitalized without the stress of worrying are we going to be able to make the rent.”

When the second firm lost the contract, Arlyssa wound up without a job. “My life went backwards and I wound up on the other side,” she said. “I began to live the work of people I used to counsel.”

Sarah Prada

Fall River, Massachusetts

Sarah used to work for a bank where she earned good pay and had sick and vacation time and was able to drive a

new car. “It didn’t hit me until I didn’t have any of that,” she says.

After a divorce, Sarah had to relocate with her two children and take a position at a hair salon. “Now I carpool to work, and have to choose between my paycheck and my health,” she says. “If I get sick and call out—that’s a day less I take home at the end of the week. I don’t understand why anyone wouldn’t support earned sick time.”

Anne Lott

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Anne had a good-paying factory job, except she didn’t have sick time to care for her kids. As a mother of seven, she had six days of absences when her kids were sick over the course of a year – and for that she was let go. Anne and her kids had to double up with her mother to survive. For years she got lower-paying jobs, also without paid sick days. Now in her 50s, Anne is starting over as a personal care attendant, working six days a week to try to get on her feet.

For Anne, earned sick and safe time is about more than sick days. “It’s about job security and family stability. We need to pass an earned sick and safe time law to help moms like me raise kids like mine. No one else should have to pick between caring for their kids or keeping their job.”

LIFE WITHOUT PAID FAMILY LEAVE

LOSING OUT WHILE SAYING GOODBYE

Jerrilyn Heiman

Dobbs Ferry, NY



Jerrilyn Heiman, an only child, lost her mother when she was 15. From then on, she and her dad stood by each other. So when he had a heart attack at 94, Jerrilyn spent the final six-and-a-half weeks with him. She was fortunate to have an employer who told her to “take all the time you need,” even though her hours as an admin for a children’s agency fall just shy of the 1250 needed to qualify for FMLA.

“I know when it’s my time to die and I think back about my life, I won’t give a damn whether I was at work or not,” Jerrilyn says, “but I will care that I was with my dad. I’m not saying work is not important... I love being an admin. But it’s not as important as my family.”

Still, taking the time unpaid was a hardship. “My bank account was decimated,” Jerrilyn says. “Tell me a day when you don’t need money—especially today, when gas prices are outrageous. If I dipped into my savings, what would I do when I retire—eat cat food?”

Lin Nestler

Aurora, Colorado

In 2012, Lin’s father required heart surgery, during which he suffered catastrophic brain damage. Knowing his wishes, she arranged for him to be discharged under hospice care at home, with herself as his primary caregiver. Having only unpaid FMLA leave, Lin had to cash out her 401K, pay bills with her credit cards and sell any valuables she had. “This was nothing compared to the pain of watching my dad fade away,” she

says. “This is what families DO. They care for each other.”

Lin says her father lived three months, “just long enough for me to lose my job.” They moved into an RV and had her daughter stay with another family to continue going to the local school. “Since we were technically homeless, I knew she at least got one good meal a day there.” It took another five months for Lin to find a new job. “I couldn’t get unemployment because my termination was ‘voluntary,’ says Lin. “I didn’t qualify for food stamps. Three months of paid leave would have made a huge difference, but now bankruptcy looms.”

CHOOSING BETWEEN HEALTHY PREGNANCY AND A PAYCHECK

Christina Corvin

Marysville, Washington

When Christina was pregnant with her son Calvin, she worked at a major pizza-delivery chain. The job didn’t provide health insurance, maternity leave or sick days. Christina was determined to work as long as possible because she knew she’d have to go two months without income after Calvin was born.

“I worked next to two 450-degree ovens and stood on my feet for eight or more hours at a time, often with no time for a break,” Christina

says. When she started having early contractions, her fiancé, Tyler, begged her to stop working. “I could feel our bank account hemorrhaging,” she said.

Recovering from an emergency c-section and grappling with post-partum depression meant she needed a lot of help to care for Calvin when they brought him home. But Tyler had to return to work after a week because they couldn’t afford to lose any more pay. Says Christina, “If we had paid family leave in Washington, our family could have taken the time to care for each other, heal and enjoy every tender first moment with our beautiful baby boy.”

Jenny Raziq

Madison, Wisconsin

“Nobody in the United States should have to choose between a healthy pregnancy and jeopardizing their job.”

Jenny is the primary breadwinner in her family. A year ago she lost a baby after a high-risk pregnancy. When she found out she was pregnant again, Jenny says, “I was so happy for another chance, but so scared that I would lose another baby.” As a retail worker—with the highest sales in the region—Jenny is on her feet all day. After Jenny ended up in the emergency room, her doctor wrote an order that she should not be on her feet for more than 5 or 6 hours at a time. Her employer said they could not accommodate her and tried to get Jenny to take an unpaid leave of absence.

“Throughout my pregnancy I would stay at work even when I was in pain to ensure that I could continue to pay the bills,” she says. Eventually she brought in her own stool. Happily, she made it to the end of her term and was blessed with a beautiful baby girl. “Nobody in the United States should have to choose between a healthy pregnancy and jeopardizing their job,” Jenny says.

Melissa Bravo

Raleigh, North Carolina

Melissa, a nurse at a community health clinic, has three beautiful daughters and three very different birth experiences. With the first daughter, she was a full-time student. For the second, she had a professional job and access to FMLA, but still worried about the impact on her job and went back after only six weeks. The most difficult was her third delivery. This time Melissa was in a new job and not yet covered by FMLA.

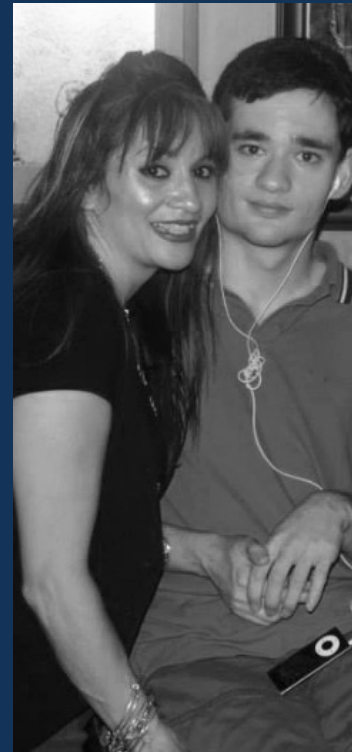
“I was told my job was not guaranteed,” she said. Due to the stress of her employment situation, her doctor recommended a medical leave – but work would not allow it. A week later Melissa went into premature labor.



LIVING ON THE BRINK

Tammy Russo

Coventry, Rhode Island



When Tammy’s son Joey, then age 20, was hospitalized for 17 days, he needed a parent with him at all times. Joey has severe cognitive disabilities, including autism, and physical disabilities.

He underwent three major surgeries, two of them brain surgeries, and several other procedures. Joey cannot be easily understood by others, is highly anxious, and can become combative if he is in unfamiliar, unpredictable places.

Tammy and her husband were critical to Joey’s care in the hospital, including getting him to take his required medications and calming him when endless teams of medical strangers entered his room. They were also responsible for the round-the-clock care he needed upon discharge.

“The financial strain of my FMLA leave was substantial but unfortunately its coverage wasn’t,” Tammy says. They worried about how to pay the bills and still allow Joey to receive care from the ones who know his needs best. Had Rhode Island’s Temporary Caregiver Insurance fund already been in place, Tammy and her family could have been spared tremendous emotional and financial stress.

Shelby Ramirez

Denver, Colorado



In addition to being a mother and grandmother of two, Shelby is a caregiver for her elderly father. She works full time as a hotel security officer and is a student at the University of Denver Colorado Women's College.

When Shelby's younger daughter and her father needed surgery at the same time, she didn't hesitate to take care of them. FMLA protected her job, but going just two and a half weeks without pay left her with an enormous financial burden. Says Shelby, "I had to choose between paying rent or paying for my family's medications and meals." Had she needed two months' leave, she'd have been homeless. As it was, she had to pawn – and lose – the only thing of value she owned, a ring her father had given her years earlier, and struggle for months to catch up with her bills.

"I'm a dedicated worker," says Shelby. "I take pride in everything that I do—but first and foremost is my family."

I'm a dedicated worker. I take pride in everything I do - but first and foremost is my family.

Toniquia Douglas

Winston-Salem, North Carolina



Toniquia is an assistant teacher at a day care center who had no paid maternity leave. She had a caesarean section but came back

after six weeks because she could not afford any more time without pay. She and her husband wound up with a lot of debt. "It took much longer than we hoped and prayed for" to pay it back, Toniquia said.

FEELING LUCKY—BUT SEEING THE NEED FOR BETTER OPTIONS

Christine Palm

Chester, Connecticut



Christine and her husband are the primary caretakers for their elderly mothers—both age 94—as well as a son who has various medical and dental appointments. Christine manages communications for a non-profit and considers herself among the lucky ones because her husband has the flexibility and commitment to handle emergencies and appointments for both generations.

Christine would like to see a family and medical leave insurance plan to provide a financial cushion for those who take "hundreds of unremunerated hours off each year" to help care for a mother dealing with dementia or recovering from a fall. She knows the "peace of mind and heart" would "make us better workers."

Kathleen Fluery

Camden, Maine

When Kathleen was five months pregnant with her first child, her boss sat her down and said, "I don't want you to have to choose between work and being a mom." She is eternally grateful to him for that—and for providing the flexibility she needed. But she had only three weeks of paid leave plus accrued sick time, and went unpaid the remaining six weeks of her leave.

Now expecting her second child, Kathleen is making more money, but as the primary earner in her family, she can't afford to take a significant chunk of time unpaid.

Kathleen considers herself "one of the lucky ones" because she has lots of support and some small savings. "I have a great job that I love. And yet the embarrassingly archaic state law for family leave will drastically affect my experience—and my happiness—this fall. Our society—especially our mothers and our children—can't shoulder the myriad consequences of inadequate bonding time between mother and baby."

SUCCESS STORIES AND HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

CARING FOR KIDS—WITH JOB SECURITY

Leah Pimentel

San Francisco, California



Leah's young son, Lawrence, suffered a severe asthma attack and would have died if she hadn't been able to get him immediately to the emergency room. She sent an email to HR letting them know she would be using a paid sick day—thanks to San Francisco's law guaranteeing this to all employees.

Says Leah, "If the emergency rooms offered frequent visit points similar

to credit cards, the Pimentel family would have earned free flights around the world." The nurses rushed Lawrence to a breathing treatment as both his parents held him because he was scared of the mask that would save his life. "Because of paid sick days, I was able to care for my son without worrying about job security," Leah said. "A mother should never have to choose between her child and job security in a life or death situation."

Mary Ignatius

San Francisco, California

Mary lives in the first state to pass a paid family leave program. When she gave birth in 2009, she could afford the time she needed to deal with challenges in breastfeeding. "I was able to go on to nurse and pump for six months, which I probably would have given up on had I not had paid family leave," Mary says.

Four years later, pregnant with her second son, Mary got a call from a genetics counselor that her baby was likely to have bilateral club feet. From week two to week ten of his young life, he went in weekly to get casts from toes to thigh. After five weeks, he had an outpatient ankle procedure, casts for three more weeks, until eventually he was fitted for braces. Thanks to paid family leave, Mary says, "I didn't have to worry about anything but him. If I had to go back to work at the six-week mark, I would have crumbled; I would have been a walking disaster both at home and at work."



Jason Butkowski

West Long Branch, New Jersey

When Jason's twins were born, they spent 69 days in neonatal intensive care. Fortunately, they didn't have significant problems other than being born prematurely, but when they went home, the doctor told Jason and his wife that their immune systems were too compromised to go to day care until they were six months old. Thanks to New Jersey's family leave insurance program, Jason was able to take paid leave after his wife exhausted her paid time and keep the babies home until that mark.

"There's this mentality that dads go to work, moms stay home with kids," says Jason. "When you're forced into something else, you realize how silly that mentality is." He's really grateful he had that time with Jack and Ava, "seeing them develop their personalities, playing with them, watching them develop from these helpless kids—babies in a bubble—into responsive, constantly talking crazy little guys they are now, was great."

“There’s this mentality that dads go to work, moms stay home with kids. When you’re forced into something else, you realize how silly that mentality is.”

REAPING THE BENEFITS OF BETTER HEALTH—FINALLY

Avery Leinova

Portland, Oregon

Avery has worked as a dispatcher for a cab company for 14 years and drove a cab for seven years before that. Until Portland passed a paid sick days law, she got paid only after being out sick without pay for three days. So she took medications to mask the symptoms and went in to work ill. “It’s hard to get better this way,” Avery

notes, “but I had no choice because I couldn’t afford to lose a day’s wages.” It’s also hard to answer phones with five-minute coughing fits, and working while sick made her take longer to get well.

Portland’s new law is benefitting not only Avery but thousands of others. “There are single parents and families for whom missing a day’s wages means going without food,” she says. “Everyone needs to be able to take paid sick leave when they’re sick—on the first day they’re sick.”

KEEPING GREAT EMPLOYEES BY DOING THE RIGHT THING

Linda Pogue

Decatur, Georgia

Linda Pogue is Program Director at disABILITY LINK, a not-for-profit center for independent living run by and for people with disabilities. The organization provides paid sick days to employees to use for themselves or members of their immediate family. According to Linda, that “generates and rewards loyalty to the organization—it is a relatively inexpensive way to support staff members. Trained and experienced staff members are valued and feel valued.”

The group wants staff members to be focused and centered. No one

can do their best “when worried and distracted by the ill health of family members,” says Linda—“better to respond to the situation, and then return to work with concerns alleviated.”

“No one can do their best work when worried by the ill health of family members. It is better to respond to the situation, and then return to work with concerns alleviated.”

Lisa Goodbee

Centennial, Colorado



Lisa owns Goodbee & Associates, a woman-run engineering firm. She started the firm 20 years ago with the hope of creating a more family-friendly work environment. Says Lisa, “I have seen far too many women leave their demanding jobs because the majority of employers in this industry have yet to embrace workplace flexibility and family-friendly practices.”

Lisa already provides paid family and medical leave because she believes “it isn’t just the right thing to do, but it makes good business sense.” She points to its role in retaining a loyal, talented workforce and boosting the bottom line. “Many small business owners, myself included, think of their employees like family, so it’s no surprise they support these types of programs,” she says.

“I have had employees with cancer and ailing parents and children, and I am proud to say that they have never had to choose between their careers and their health or their family’s needs. I believe in family medical leave insurance because it will help ensure this is the norm and not the exception in small and large businesses alike.”

Liza Cain and Randy George

Moretown, Vermont

Liza and Randy co-own the Red Hen Bakery in Middlesex, Vermont. All their 42 employees earn paid sick days. “First of all,” says Liza, “we’re making food, and people can’t be making food when they’re sick. We feel that they’ll also get well faster, so in the long run, it pays off for us. And as parents, we recognize that the entire family is part of the picture.”

Liza and Randy have seen the value of these policies in job retention. They’ve added a wellness room in the bakery for lactating moms and monthly



massages. “It’s been a long time since we’ve had a lot of turnover and now we have even less,” Liza says. “So we benefit from having a really seasoned staff who have been here in most cases for a number of years. People can see this as being a career rather than a temporary service job.”

“As parents, we realize the entire family is part of the picture.”

**FAMILY
VALUES
@ WORK**

FAMILY VALUES @ WORK

Family Values @ Work is a network of coalitions in 21 states working for paid sick days, family leave insurance and other policies that value families at work.

Visit www.FamilyValuesAtWork.org for more stories and information on how you can become involved.

